

Testimony for USDA Listening Session, July 26, 2001  
Bloomington, MN

USDA plays a vital role in the understanding of families, communities, and the interface with policies that influence the way one lives and works. The funding that is provided through the CSREES Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service for joint research and outreach is vital. Also supplemental funding that is provided by the National Initiatives Competitive Grant Program forms a strong support for research projects that seek to better understand families, communities, and policies.

One example that has received support from all three entities within CSREES is the NC-223 Multi-State Research Project "Rural Low-Income Families: Tracking Their Well-Being and Functioning in the Context of Welfare Reform." This project has 15 cooperating states across all regions of the United States and includes faculty funded by both the Agricultural Experiment Station and the Cooperative Extension Service in some states. All of the 15 states have funded the data collection and preparation for analysis for the longitudinal project. However, when it came to infrastructure to have the project function at a level that would allow for the in-depth analysis across the states and the policy implications, a source of funding was needed. The NRICGP was vital to provide the value added to the initial investments made by the states. This funded work needed for central coding, analysis, web presence, and a new way of working for the 28 researchers and 40 graduate students from the 15 states. Without this funding, it would be hard to imagine the outcome for the project.

The potential outcome will be the understanding of rural low-income families functioning in the changing policy environment. This includes the policy environment for food programs, food security, health issues, rural transportation issues as well as the basic understanding of the economic well-being functioning of the families which for many is the way they live and work. An important concept here is the role that each of the funding levels plays in order to have a more complex societal problem be on the forefront of the research and education agenda for the USDA.

Thanks for continuing to support the integrative and cooperative work of research and education and also providing a source for competitive supplemental funding such as the NRICGP.

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